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H. M.

THE CHINESE CHANTING OF THE CLASSICS

In one of Mr. Yeats' books—*Thoughts on Good and Evil* I think it is—he gives an account of the method of chanting poetry in use by the early Irish bards. These bards, he says, deliberately pitched the speaking, not the singing, voice in definite if irregular intervals. He illustrates it with a magical setting in this style of a short poem of his own from *Countess Kathleen*.

It is interesting to compare this method of Irish bards with the system of chanting the classics in China, a system which was doubtless in use before the days of St. Patrick and which flourishes among scholars today.

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

To be able to *be*, or chant from memory, a large part of the *Book of Odes*, is an essential to a classical education in China, and every scholar of the old school falls automatically into the chant when asked to recite them.

Unlike the Irish bards the Chinese use the full singing voice in their chanting, and the tunes they use have a much more definite melody than that recorded by Mr. Yeats. Yet it is in its essence much the same thing, a loose, flowing chant which varies from individual to individual and from moment to moment as the exigencies of the poem and the emotions of the singer dictate.

The rhythm of the chant is very definite, though more complex than the usual song rhythm with us. This follows the rhythms of their verse forms, which, unlike the Japanese, have a system of scansion much like our own, a system in which the quantitative element in English poetry is replaced by the accentual element inherent in the vocal tones which distinguish the Chinese language. The usual stanza in Chinese is four or eight lines in length, each line having five or seven syllables—the whole being as definitely set as to rhyme and rhythm scheme as a villanelle with us.

With the help of Miss Elizabeth Hammond, the violin-cellist, I am able to set down here the tunes used by two scholars in reciting a famous four-line poem, *Spring Evening*, by Su Shih (1036-1101).

The literal translation, which seems to me to give the taste of Chinese thinking better than any formalized version, is this:

The Chinese Chanting of the Classics

Spring evening, one moment, price thousand gold.
Flowers have fresh odor, moon has shadow.
Singing, piping (comes from the) balcony floor, fine, fine.
(Children are) Swinging in the garden; evening drips, drips.

The words in parenthesis are understood. The last three words mean that the water in the water-glass which is recording the evening drips and drips.

The poem is a *tsüeh* beginning in the *Ping* tone, and the metrical skeleton is as follows. The *Ping* is the low, even tone, and the *Tseh* includes the other three tones of the Chinese language, which are all higher and sharper than *Ping*. *Tseh* is therefore higher and louder than *Ping*, but there is no difference in length. The first, second and fourth lines rhyme.

Ping ping tseh tseh tseh ping ping
Ping tseh ping ping tseh tseh ping
Ping tseh ping ping ping tseh tseh
Ping ping tseh tseh tseh ping ping

In setting down the chants which follow we have perhaps put them slightly out of joint, as the intervals of the Chinese scale do not correspond exactly with the arbitrary intervals of our "well-tuned clavichord". But we have tried to remedy this by placing an L, for lower, and an H, for higher, over certain notes to indicate that they are between the note written and the half-tone next above or below. There are also numerous slurs, quavers and grace-notes which we have not been able to render exactly, but some effect of the whole may be gained from these transcriptions, particularly if given *glissando* by the voice or a stringed instrument.

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

First Tune

Tshung siau ih khuh dzeh tshien kyung

Hwo yeu tshing hyang yoeh yeu iung.

Koo kwen leu de sung sien sien

Tshieu tshien yoen loh ye dzung dzung

Second Tune

Tshung siau ih khuh dzeh tshien kyung

Hwo yeu tshing hyang yoeh yeu iung

Koo kwen leu de sung sien sien

Tshieu tshien yoen loh ye dzung dzung.

It will be seen that the rather complex rhythm scheme is identical in the two chants, and that they bear some general

The Chinese Chanting of the Classics

thematic resemblance one to the other, although the details may vary infinitely, the same man singing the same poem differently at different times. The general effect of the monosyllables, each one of which is a word, is clear and nasal in quality, with the soft yet nasal *ng* sound of the French language much in evidence.

It is interesting to think of the probable effect on an Anglo-Saxon audience of reciting one of our own classical lyrics, say Herrick's *To Daisies, not to shut so soon*, in this oriental fashion. The "closeness of the Chinese soul", of which Carl Sandburg writes so assuredly, has decidedly its limitations.

Eunice Tietjens

A JITNEY-BUS AMONG MASTERPIECES

A type of criticism coming into vogue lately is of the subjective or pseudo-impressionist variety, imitative of the leisurely mode of the mature minds of certain distinguished French critics. But the minds of those in this country who affect the method are anything but mature—in years or in experience. Having accepted as their motto Anatole France's remark that criticism is a soul's adventures among masterpieces, it does not occur to them that it may make some difference whether the soul is, or is not, well qualified for the adventure. I often feel, when reading such criticism, as if I had been asked to take a jitney-bus sight-seeing tour through a metropolis of masterpieces—or near-masterpieces, as it may happen. With these the guide is indifferently familiar, but *familiar* at any cost, and their *raison d'être* as